

FROM DANTE TO SAINT CATHERINE

poverty.¹ This appears to have been in 1355, the year of the downfall of the Nine. A few years later, they carried out Pietro's counsels, placed their daughters in the Benedictine monastery of Santa Bonda (of which the Abbess, Madonna Paola di Ser Ghino Foresi, was a sort of spiritual mother to this new movement), and gave away all their possessions to religion and the poor—Giovanni first making adequate provision for Monna Biagia, his wife. Even as they had punished their former avarice with poverty, they sought for shame where they had once received honour ; and for two months, the time during which they had sat in the supreme magistracy of the Nine, they performed all the menial work of the Palace, begging their food in the meanwhile through the streets.

Disciples came to them, who were received and clothed with rags at the Madonna of the Campo, and initiated into the spirit of these new *poverelli* by public humiliation through the streets of Siena—which one young noble who joined them confessed that he found as bitter as death.² Among the earliest of these *Gesuati* (as they were afterwards called) was Tommaso di Guelfaccio, one of the leading Noveschi, previously a man of soft and luxurious life, whom we shall meet again in Catherine's circle. Giovanni and Francesco then wandered over the Sienese contado, preaching Christ and Poverty, working everywhere a wonderful revival, stirring up a new life among the Franciscans and Dominicans themselves, who welcomed them with enthusiasm, especially at Asciano and Montalcino. Said a friar minor to Giovanni: " If religious will once more begin to speak only of God, the spirit of holy fervour will return among us, and we shall set the world on fire."⁸ Banished from the Sienese dominions by the Twelve, they wandered to Arezzo, Citta di Castello,

¹ Pietro Petroni died in 1361. A vision which he had upon his death-bed brought about the conversion of Boccaccio. Cf. Petrarca, *Rerum Sent/turn*, Lib. I. ep. 5 ; Bartholomaeus Senensis, *Vita. B. Petri Petroni*, III. i, z, n.

² Cf. *Lettere delE. Giovanni Colombini*, 87, the reception of Giovanni di Niccol6 di Verdusa. ⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.